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TOPONYMIC WEBSITES

Homepage of the Place Names Board of Estonia

Paper submitted by Estonia**

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At the first meeting of the newly formed Place Names Board of Estonia in June 1997, it was decided to seek greater openness in publishing information on geographical names. Press releases and other attempts to publicize decisions on names had been inadequate in the sense that for the general public only short and generally worded summaries appeared in some newspapers, but for those taking a greater interest in names matters it was not easy to get full and authentic information.

With the spread of the Internet and computer technology in Estonia, it became possible to reach the audience via World Wide Web. On 9 September 1997 the Place Names Board opened its first homepage (<http://www.eki.ee/knn/>), which was provided by a server at the Institute of the Estonian Language. Currently most of the documents of the Board have been converted into HTML documents and displayed on the homepage. These include the main legal acts (the Law on Place Names and other regulations, with explanations of terms), minutes of the Board's meetings and lists of currently discussed names. The structure and composition of the pages are still under discussion and therefore possible users are invited to contribute suggestions and advice.

One of the positive effects of the homepage has been that it can reduce significantly the amount of paper used. For example, when the list of populated places with about 4,500 names is discussed by the Board, instead of receiving hundreds of pages of documents with names, working group suggestions, etc., the Board members will be able to view the documents on the Board's homepage. About three quarters of the Board's members can access the Internet directly from their workplace, and the remainder will be able to find other points of access.

The same applies to other institutions interested in geographical names: local governments, mapping enterprises, researchers into local history, etc. Through the homepage they can benefit from the activities of the Place Names Board and also contribute to its work. Although the main texts of the homepage are in Estonian there is also an English page (<http://www.eki.ee/knn/index2.htm>) containing information on the Board's activities and titles or summaries of documents available in Estonian. Some of the documents will be translated into English as well.

A separate page is devoted to the activities of the Baltic Division of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN). The information is in English, Estonian and Russian. There are also links to other information on geographical names, where references to names authorities and toponymic data all over the world are included. The objective is to make this list of links as exhaustive as possible.
